

# ESTHER STUDY 6

## *Exalted Humility*

The message of chapter six is summed up in a verse from James, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”<sup>1</sup> Off the top of my head I can’t think of a more direct example of this truth in Scripture. Let’s dive right into the passage to see the Lord’s hand at work in the lives of Haman and Mordecai.

After a night of tossing and turning in the royal bedchamber (a divine bout of insomnia, as many commentators agree), King Xerxes calls for the records of his reign to be read to him. During the reading, he realizes that an act of great loyalty has been sorely overlooked. Mordecai’s message about Bigthana and Teresh’s plot was received and acted upon, but never rewarded. Let’s pause here for just a moment. Have you ever felt like your act of kindness, friendship, or loyalty was completely overlooked? Or perhaps that God missed a time when you acted in obedience? Mordecai might have felt that way, especially considering the immense favor Haman was experiencing at the king’s hand. However, we don’t hear about any pity parties thrown by Mordecai; in fact, the lack of recognition doesn’t even seem to phase him. I think maybe he had learned the secret of contentment in God, regardless of earthly recognition.

I have to admit, when I feel overlooked, especially when I feel like God hasn’t seen what I have “done/given up/acted in obedience on,” I feel slighted, maybe even angry. What a contrast we find in the Scripture concerning how our attitude ought to look: “So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.’”<sup>2</sup> Does this passage chafe your pride? I know it has mine. When I find myself reacting negatively to these words, I have to do a perspective check: How do I really see God?

In contrast to the humility of Mordecai, we are abruptly confronted with Haman’s ego as he enters the outer court to seal Mordecai’s fate. Haman decided on the same night that the king couldn’t sleep to have the gallows built. He was so eager for the destruction of one common Jew that refused him the honor he obviously thought he deserved that he arrived in the outer court at the crack of dawn to get the death warrant. God couldn’t have had more perfect timing in reminding the king of the great service Mordecai had rendered to the crown. But look how close to the deadline He acted! If He had waited several more hours, Mordecai would have been a goner! God is seldom early, but He is never late. Depend on Him to accomplish His plan in His time, and you won’t ever be disappointed. You’ll probably be a whole lot less stressed as well!

Haman shows his true colors when the king requests his advice on this issue of honor. The author of Esther gives us the inside look at Haman’s thought process in response to Xerxes’ question, “What should be done to the man whom the king delights to honor?” Haman immediately jumps to conclusions: “Whom would the king

### *Pre-Article Questions:*

1. Have you ever done something nice for someone only for it to go totally unnoticed? How did that make you feel? What was your response to their lack of response?
2. People say, “Pride goes before a fall.” Have you ever seen this happen? Has it ever happened to you?

1. James 4:6  
2. Luke 17:9

delight to honor more than me?" The banquet the night before has gone to his head. He thinks that there is no one in the kingdom so immersed in Xerxes' good graces as he. In his reply we get an even closer look at his enormous ego: For the man the king delights to honor, let royal robes be brought, which the king has worn, and the horse that the king has ridden, and on whose head a royal crown is set. ...Let them dress the man whom the king delights to honor, and let them lead him on the horse through the square of the city, proclaiming before him: 'Thus shall it be done for the man whom the king delights to honor.'<sup>3</sup>

Haman doesn't hesitate for a second. He's dreamed about this moment. Let's look at this statement in cultural context: If you look back at 1 Kings 1:28-35 you will see David transferring the kingship of Israel to his son, Solomon. He gives very specific orders on how the ceremony is to occur, one of which was "have Solomon my son ride on my own mule." And then in Luke 19:30, Jesus requested that the disciples bring Him a colt, "which no one has ever ridden" for His triumphal entry. Riding on someone else's mount in effect bestowed the same honor, or dishonor, to you that was accorded to its master. Haman shows his hand here, he wants to be king!<sup>4</sup>

Does this pride (that heralds Haman's fall) look familiar to you? I would be a liar to say I don't look at Haman and see myself. As Beth Moore observes: We can develop a ravenous appetite for honor – even if we try to keep it hidden... One of the bad things about an insatiable desire for honor is that sooner or later it is going to make a fool of us, robbing us of the very thing we intended to receive.<sup>5</sup>

Haman not only lost the honor he intended for himself, but was forced to bestow it on his greatest enemy. Talk about humbling! We need to be reminded daily to "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so at the proper time He may exalt you."<sup>6</sup> I encourage you to examine your heart and confess the pride you find there. It is much more pleasant to humble ourselves voluntarily than to be humbled forcibly. And God has a precious promise for those who humble themselves: "For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted."<sup>7</sup>

### *Esther 6, NIV*

1 That night the king could not sleep; so he ordered the book of the chronicles, the record of his reign, to be brought in and read to him. 2 It was found recorded there that Mordecai had exposed Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's officers who guarded the doorway, who had conspired to assassinate King Xerxes. 3 "What honor and recognition has Mordecai received for this?" the king asked. "Nothing has been done for him," his attendants answered. 4 The king said, "Who is in the court?" Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the palace to speak to the king about impaling Mordecai on the pole he had set up for him. 5 His attendants answered, "Haman is standing in the court." "Bring him in," the king ordered. 6 When Haman entered, the king asked him, "What should be done for the man the king delights to honor?" Now Haman thought to himself, "Who is there that the king would rather honor than me?" 7 So he answered the king, "For the man the king delights to honor, 8 have them bring a royal robe the king has worn and a horse the king has ridden, one with a royal crest placed on its head. 9 Then let the robe and horse be entrusted to one of the king's most noble princes. Let them robe the man the king delights to honor, and lead him on the horse through the city streets, proclaiming before him, 'This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!'" 10 "Go at once," the king commanded Haman. "Get the robe and the horse and do just as you have suggested for Mordecai the

3. Esther 6:7-9

4. Ironsides p 188

5. Beth Moore

6.1 Peter 5:6

7. Matthew 23:12

Jew, who sits at the king's gate. Do not neglect anything you have recommended." 11 So Haman got the robe and the horse. He robed Mordecai, and led him on horseback through the city streets, proclaiming before him, "This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!" 12 Afterward Mordecai returned to the king's gate. But Haman rushed home, with his head covered in grief, 13 and told Zeresh his wife and all his friends everything that had happened to him. His advisers and his wife Zeresh said to him, "Since Mordecai, before whom your downfall has started, is of Jewish origin, you cannot stand against him—you will surely come to ruin!" 14 While they were still talking with him, the king's eunuchs arrived and hurried Haman away to the banquet Esther had prepared.

### *Prayer*

Father, You are so gracious to us. Thank you for being long-suffering and merciful when we have too high an opinion of ourselves. Thank you for never letting any act of obedience, however small, go unnoticed. You are so just, Lord, and Your timing is always perfect. Please help us to trust You to work out Your sovereign plan for our lives. Forgive us when we allow ourselves to sink into self-pity, believing the lie that You don't value Your children. Please teach us to humble ourselves under Your mighty hand and to see ourselves as You see us. You are great and exalted high above every man. Your ways are not our ways and Your thoughts are not our thoughts. Let us act with the faith of Mordecai and persevere in whatever task You have given us, heedless of men's accolades. And keep us from the snare of an insatiable desire for honor. We only want to seek to delight Your heart, finding our hope and purpose in You. Teach me to seek You and Your glory above all else. Thank You for Your promise to exalt those who humble themselves before You. We love You, Lord. Amen.

### *Scripture Questions:*

1. Even though God is never directly mentioned in the book of Esther, we certainly see His hand at work. Where do we see Him intervening in this chapter?
2. How did Xerxes describe Mordecai when commanding Haman to carry out his own suggestions? Look back at Esther 2:19-23. Where is Mordecai? Do you think he felt forgotten by the king? What effect does this have on his attitude?
3. Read Esther 6:6-10. Then turn to 1 Kings 1:28-35. Compare Haman's suggestions with the orders David gave to his chief counselors concerning his son, Solomon. Do any of David's commands sound familiar?
4. Characterize Haman's attitude leading up to verse 10. Why do you think Zeresh and the friends respond to him the way they do at the end of the chapter?

### *Application Questions:*

1. Look at Haman's response to having to honor Mordecai and compare it with Mordecai's response to the honor. How have you been tempted to respond when someone you don't like has been forced to eat "humble pie?"
2. Please read Proverbs 29:23 and Luke 18:9-14. Are there areas in your life you need to lay before the Lord and ask Him to take control? What are some practical steps you can take to humble yourself before Him?
3. Look at the quiet faith expressed in the simple statement of where Mordecai could be found: "Get the robe and the horse and do just as you have suggested for Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king's gate."

### *Application Questions: (continued)*

Have you experienced a situation where you felt like your faithfulness was overlooked? Please read Hebrews 6:10. How does this verse change your perspective?

4. Mordecai exemplified the attitude Jesus said we should have in Luke 17:9. Who else had this attitude? (See Philippians 2:5-11.) How can we also have this attitude?

5. What has encouraged you most about this passage and looking at how Haman and Mordecai acted in response to their environment (or their God)?

### *Prayer Partner Assignment:*

This week you will be meeting with a girl from your small group to memorize scripture, re-read the text for this week, and discuss what God is speaking to you through the Chapter. Please use this time to pursue the Lord together and deepen your relationship as sisters.

1. Memory Verse: Matthew 23:12
2. Please re-read Esther Chapter Six